



Captain John Smith's Chesapeake Bay

An Excerpt from Captain John Smith's *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New England, and the Summer Isles*

Of mines we were all ignorant, but a few Beuers, Otters, Beares, Martins and minkes we found, and in diuers places that abundance of fish, lying so thicke with their heads aboue the water, as for want of nets (our barge driuing amongst them) we attempted to catch them with a frying pan: but we found it a bad instrument to catch fish with: neither better fish, more plenty, nor more variety for smal fish, had any of vs euer seene in any place so swimming in the water, but they are not to be caught with frying pans. Some small codd also we did see swim close by the shor by Smiths Iles, and some as high as Riccards Clifts. And some we haue found dead vpon the shore.

To express all our quarrels, trecheries and incounters amongst those Salvages I should be too tedious: but in breefe, at all times we so incountred them, and curbed their insolencies, that they concluded with presents to purchase peace; yet we lost not a man: at our first meeting our Captaine euer observed this order, to demand their bowes and arrowes, swordes, mantells and furs, with some childe or two for hostage, whereby we could quickly perceiue, when they intended any villany.

Hauing finished this discouery (though our victuall was neere spent) he intended to see his imprisonment-acquaintances vpon the riuer Rapahanock, by many called Toppahanock, but our bo[a]te by reason of the ebbe, chancing to grownd vpon a many shoules lying in the entrances, we spyed many fishes lurking in the reedes: our Captaine sporting himselfe by nayling them to the grownd with his sword, set vs all a fishing in that manner: thus we tooke more in one houre then we could eate in a day.

But it chanced our Captaine taking a fish from his sword (not knowing her condition) being much of the fashion of a Thornback, but a long tayle like a ryding rodde, whereon the middest is a most poysoned sting, of two or three inches long, bearded like a saw on each side, which she strucke into the wrest of his arme neere an inch and a halfe: no bloud nor wound was seene, but a little blew spot, but the torment was instantly so extreame, that in foure houres had so swollen his hand, arme and shoulder, we all with much sorrow concluded his funerall, and prepared his graue in an Island by, as himselfe directed: yet it pleased God by a precious oyle Docter Russell at the first applied to it when he sounded it with probe, (ere night) his tormenting paine was so well asswaged that he eate of the fish to his supper, which gaue no lesse ioy and content to vs then ease to himselfe. For which we called the Island Stingray Isle after the name of the fish.

Smith, John. *The Generall Historie of Virginia, New-England, and the Summer Isles: with the names of the Adventurers, Planters, and Governours from their first beginning An: 1584. to this present 1624. Travels and Works.* 1910. Ed. Edward Arber. Vol. 2. New York: Burt Franklin, 1967. 418–419. 2 vols.